

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Who Are Gog and Magog in Revelation?

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John describes the invasion of Gog and Magog as follows: “When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:7–10).

Many have noted the general parallels between Revelation 20:1–22 and Ezekiel 37–48. The first resurrection and the messianic millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4–6) correspond to the revival of the dry bones and the reunited kingdom under the Davidic messiah (Ezek. 37:1–28). The final battle against Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7–10) has its counterpart in Ezekiel 38–39. The descent of the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22) corresponds to Ezekiel’s vision of a new temple and a New Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40–48).

Identification of Gog and Magog

Three major identifications of “the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog” have been suggested.¹ First, Gog and Magog stand for a demonic army. This raises the question why John does not speak more explicitly of demons, which he can easily do (see Rev. 9:20; 16:14; 18:2, where the Greek term *daimonion* is used). In the book of Revelation, the word “nations” refers to humans.

Second, Gog and Magog represent the inhabitants of the earth who were not destroyed in the battle described in Revelation 19:17–21. The problem with this interpretation is the fact that the human participants in the battle of Revelation 19 are not *only* “the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies” (v. 19) but “all, both free and slave, both small

¹ For the discussion that follows in the text above, see David E. Aune, *Revelation*, WBC 52C (Dallas: Word, 1998), 3:1095; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 713, who argues for the second option; J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*, JSNTSup 70 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 126–42, who argues for the third option.

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and great” (v. 18). In antiquity, only free people fought in armies, not slaves (Hollywood movies notwithstanding). This means that Revelation 19:17–21 does not describe an actual military battle between armies but the confrontation between the followers of the Beast and (the followers of) Jesus Christ.

Third, Gog and Magog represent all the inhabitants of the earth who had followed the Beast, that is, all unbelievers who in their rebellion against God had sided with God’s arch-rebel.

The third suggestion seems the most plausible. John identifies the expression “Gog and Magog” (which occurs only here in the New Testament: Ezekiel speaks of “Gog, of the land of Magog”) with “the nations at the four corners of the earth.” Gog and Magog *are* the “nations” — the followers of the ancient Serpent and of the Beast, the sinners — rather than a select few nations.

The Four Corners of the Earth

Why are the nations described as being “at the four corners of the earth” (Rev. 20:8)? If the phrase “four corners of the earth” is taken literally, it would be a strange description of the location of “the nations” (who are Gog and Magog) who live through the millennium and are then seduced once more by Satan. The expression “four corners of the earth” seems to refer to the Abyss.

In the Old Testament and in Jewish texts, the outer edges of the world are regarded as the entrances to the underworld.² The phrase “four corners of the earth” is connected in Revelation 7:1 with four angels who restrained the attack of the evil forces from the Abyss (Rev. 8:7–8; 9:3–4). Note Revelation 9:1: “And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.” Some translations render the last word of the Greek sentence, which is *abyssou*, as “Abyss” (NIV, NET). In a revealing parallel in the Jewish apocalyptic text *1 Enoch*, the seer is shown “a place, beyond the great earth, where the heavens come together. And I saw a deep pit with heavenly fire on its pillars ... This place is the (ultimate) end of heaven and earth: it is the prison house for the stars and the powers of heaven ... Here shall stand in many different appearances the spirits of the angels which have united themselves with women. They have defiled the people and will lead them into error so that they will offer sacrifices to the demons as unto gods, until the great day of judgment in which they shall be judged till they are finished” (*1 En.* 18:10–11, 14; 19:1).

² See Psalm 61:2: “From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint.”

NIV New International Version

NET New English Translation

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In Revelation 9:2, the Abyss is also a place of fire: “he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.”

In Revelation 20:9, Satan (together with Gog and Magog) “comes up” onto the expanse of the earth. The Greek word that is used here (*anabainō*) denotes “to be in motion upward” and should be translated “go up” or “ascend.”³ This verb is used in Revelation for smoke rising up (Rev. 4:1), the two witnesses going up into heaven (11:12), the evil forces (the demonic locusts) coming out of the Abyss (9:2–3), the Beast coming up out of the sea (13:1), the second beast coming up from the earth (13:11), and the Beast coming up out the Abyss (11:7). This word is very unnatural if it is taken to describe a march of “the nations” who live on earth to some place where God’s people are gathered.

The phrase “plain of the earth” in Revelation 20:9 (NASB, NET, NLT, ESV) is unusual. It occurs only twice in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The closest parallel is Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep *in the flat of the earth* will arise, some to everlasting life but others to shame and others to dispersion [and contempt] everlasting” (LXX; Old Greek)⁴ This suggests that the place from which Satan and “the nations” identified with Gog and Magog come is the Abyss, the place of the dead and the realm of Satan.

The Unrepentant

Consequently, John seems to identify “Gog and Magog” with the “nations” who have been in the Abyss together with Satan as prisoners (Rev. 20:7). They appear to be identical with “the rest of the dead” (Rev. 20:5), that is, with the unrepentant. This is confirmed by the description of “the nations at the four corners of the earth” as being “in number ... like the sand on the seashore” (20:8 NIV; Greek, *hōs hē ammos tēs thalassēs*). In Revelation 13:1 (in the Greek text this is 12:18), the Dragon, who is Satan, stood “on the shore of the

³ The NIV is misleading when it translates “they marched across the breadth of the earth.”

NASB New American Standard Bible

NET New English Translation

NLT New Living Translation

ESV English Standard Version

LXX Septuagint

⁴ Translation quoted from R. T. McLay, in Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1022 (emphasis added).

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sea” (NIV; Greek, *epi tēn ammon tēs thalassēs*) to meet the Beast as it came out of the sea, that is, out of the Abyss (11:7; also 20:13).

Satan had been confined to the Abyss as a prisoner, unable to influence the earth for a thousand years since the Beast and the false prophet had already been thrown in the lake of fire for eternal punishment (19:20).⁵

After the thousand years, Satan and the unrepentant “come up” from the place of the dead onto the earth. Satan’s imprisonment should have taught the unrepentant that the pseudo-god who had deceived them in the past has lost his power: his deception is unmasked as he can no longer deceive the nations through the Beast and the false prophet for a thousand years.

The irony of Revelation 20:8 is that “when the unrepentant are released, they are immediately willing to forget the truth that they have just been compelled to face for a thousand long years ... all the ‘rest of the dead’ are still blind enough to believe that Satan can overcome God’s people.”⁶

The punishment for this continuing rebellion is banishment into “the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). If this interpretation is correct, there is no literal final battle between Gog and Magog (interpreted as “those who lived through the millennium and then been immediately seduced once more by Satan”⁷). There is, at the end of the thousand years, the final punishment of Satan as the supreme force of evil together with all the unrepentant.

Summary

The prophet John explains that at the end, before God’s new world becomes a reality, God will utterly and completely remove from the face of the earth the instigator of all evil and all who followed him in rebellion. In Revelation 20:8, Gog and Magog are not individual nations from the north consisting of military troops. “Gog and Magog” are all the inhabitants of the earth who follow the Beast rather than the Lamb, that is, all the unbelievers who persist in their rebellion against God. Many interpret Revelation 20:7–10 as the final battle between the nations who have been deceived by Satan after the

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⁵ Mealy compares Isaiah 24:1–27:1 with Revelation 19:19–20:10 (*After the Thousand Years*, 99–101). He writes that the unrepentant “are trapped in the nether world for ‘many days’ (Isa. 24:22), together awaiting the divine summons for judgment” (ibid., 101).

⁶ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 130.

⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 713.

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millennium. Others interpret the event as the final judgment upon Satan and the unrepentant at the time of Jesus Christ's return. The choice between these two possibilities depends on how we interpret the millennium (see question 33). Chronological questions aside, there is agreement that the judgment of "God and Magog" is God's final judgment on unrepentant sinners.⁸

⁸ Schnabel, E. J. (2011). *40 Questions about the End Times*. (B. L. Merkle, Ed.) (pp. 225–228). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional.